

CONFERENCES

IMPERIAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
CONFERENCE, 1927.

Agenda : Memorandum 5.

Periodical Conferences.



Issued by the Organising
Committee of the Conference,
10, Whitehall Place,
London, S.W.1.
September, 1927.

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It may be useful to review briefly the position as regards conferences of agricultural research workers within the Empire. The general case for such conferences does not require to be set out ; but it might perhaps be suggested that they should as a rule aim rather at definite conclusions for common action. International conferences largely cover the ground so far as concerns simply the discussion of scientific questions from a purely scientific point of view, looking solely to the advancement of knowledge.

(a) Conferences on Special Subjects.

The bodies to whom the task should fall of calling conferences of specialists in agricultural research are obviously the Imperial Bureaux, either existing or to be created. The existing Imperial Bureaux of Entomology and Mycology already call conferences of Entomologists and Mycologists within the Empire quinquennially in London, through the Colonial Office. The last conference of the former was held in 1925 and of the latter in 1924.

The suggestion has been made by the South African Government (Appendix, Paper 2) that there should be triennial conferences in London of chemists of the Empire. This desire will probably be met by a recommendation for the creation of a Bureau of Soil Science, but if the Bureau is not created, the desired arrangements for such periodical conferences of chemists will presumably have to be made by some specially designated body or institution, *e.g.*, Rothamsted.

A memorandum by Sir Arnold Theiler to the Colonial Office Conference 1927, (Appendix, Paper 3 (a)) suggested the holding of congresses on animal diseases in the Empire at reasonably short intervals, say 3-5 years. As in the case immediately above, this suggestion will presumably be covered by a recommendation for the creation of an Imperial Veterinary Research Bureau, but if not similar arrangements to those suggested for the chemists could be made.

The Lovat Committee suggested (Appendix, Paper 1) that there should be arrangements at intervals of 5 years for conferences of officials engaged overseas upon the subjects with which the clearing-house (see Agenda, Memorandum 4, on Interchange of

Information) would deal. That Committee referred also to the opportunity provided by such conferences of examining the general policy and work of the Bureaux.

(b) Conferences in Groups of Empire Countries.

It is obviously desirable that conferences dealing with agricultural research in general should be held between Empire countries situated in similar climates and having similar problems, and in fact, such conferences have already taken place, *viz.*: in the West Indies, in South and East Africa and West Africa (Ibadan in Nigeria). The last named conference is being continued biennially and arrangements have been made for as far ahead as 1933.

In a memorandum by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Colonial Office, 1927 (Appendix, Paper 3 (b)) it is pointed out that such conferences are of exceptional value, not only in themselves, but also by reason of the facilities they provide for workers in a similar field, to discuss common problems informally and to see how these problems are being tackled under varying conditions. At the West African Conference also questions concerning agricultural development were referred by the Governments to the conference for discussion and advice (Appendix, Paper 4).

The following grouping of countries is suggested by the Government of the Gold Coast for the purpose of such conferences (Appendix Paper 4) :—

1. West Africa (Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia).
2. East Africa (Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Nyasaland)
(Zanzibar should possibly also be included).
3. West Indies.
4. Indian Ocean (Ceylon, Malaya, Mauritius, Seychelles).
5. Pacific (Queensland, Fiji).

and that Government also suggests further interchange of information, discussions, and decisions between these various groups.

The case for agricultural conferences in the tropical countries in the Empire is stated in the Gold Coast Memorandum.

Suggestions for the organisation of such conferences are made by the Kenya Department of Agriculture (Appendix, Paper 5).

Where no arrangements are yet made for the calling of such conferences, it may be suggested that the initiative should lie either with one of the Governments concerned or with a Research Station. We may look forward to a chain of Research Stations, especially in tropical and sub-tropical parts of the Empire, each concerning itself with the problems of several countries. It will obviously be desirable for each such Station to call meetings of workers from the countries concerned.

(c) Continuance of the present Conference.

The whole question of the general arrangement for co-ordinating

the various Governmental bodies concerned with research in this country is now under consideration : whatever form of organisation here may be the outcome of that consideration, there seems to be some case for holding periodically (say once every five years) a conference intended primarily to review the working of the machinery for research all over the Empire, in such administrative and semi-administrative matters as those discussed at the present Conference. The completeness and efficiency of that machinery are of great importance to the whole of the Empire : and it can only be thoroughly surveyed and overhauled at a conference such as the present one.

If this view is taken, the questions would arise (a) when the next conference should be held, (b) where it should be held—perhaps, like the Imperial Forestry Conference, in another part of the Empire, (c) who should call it and make the necessary arrangements—presumably the Government of that part of the Empire where it is held.

APPENDIX.

1. Lovat Committee Report : Conferences of Officials.
2. Union of South Africa, Memorandum : Desirability of arranging for conferences of official and officially recognised agricultural chemists of the Empire to be held triennially in London.
3. Colonial Office Conference, 1927 :
 - (a) The Control of Animal Diseases in the Empire : Memorandum by Sir Arnold Theiler.
 - (b) Memorandum by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies.
4. Gold Coast, Memorandum : Necessity for Organising Regular Regional Agricultural Conferences.
5. Kenya, Memorandum : Organisation of Agricultural Conferences.
6. Nigeria, Memorandum : Veterinary Conferences.

1. LOVAT COMMITTEE REPORT.

Conferences of Officials.

81. It may be added, on the analogy of the Bureaux of Entomology and Mycology, that there should be arrangements, at intervals of five years, for conferences of officials engaged overseas upon the subjects with which the clearing-house* would deal. It has been found that conferences are invaluable in bringing together, both for formal and informal discussion, men working upon connected

* The Lovat (Colonial Office) Committee† recommended that a clearing house for collecting and disseminating information on the results of agricultural research should be set up at the Imperial Institute—except for entomology and mycology, for which arrangements are already made.

† In the Report Cmd. 2825 (1927), pp. 32 to 36.

problems in different parts of the world. Such conferences also have provided an opportunity for the general policy and working of the Bureaux to be examined from time to time in the light of the requirements of the colonies, and, if necessary, re-adjusted to changing circumstances.

2. UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA: MEMORANDUM. Desirability of arranging for Conferences of Official and Officially Recognised Agricultural Chemists of the Empire to be held triennially in London. Submitted by : The Chief, Division of Chemistry.

The several efforts recently made to secure uniformity in the conduct of fertiliser trials and the methods employed in the investigation of soils clearly indicate that a widespread opinion now exists that without systematic arrangements, under which the research work can be so conducted as to permit of an interpretation of results in general terms, as far as such is possible, the progress of agricultural science as far as it concerns soils and their relationship to crop and stock at any rate, will not be as commensurate with the expenditure of energy and capital now being devoted to it as it should be and much of the work now being done is likely to be of limited value.

A study of the several recommendations thus far made lead one to the conclusion that no uniformity of procedure can be attained without full and free discussion from time to time amongst the many investigators who are now engaged upon the numerous soil problems which present themselves.

Whilst much can be done by correspondence, such method of carrying on discussion cannot fully replace the personal representation of views and it is felt by the Division of Chemistry of the Department of Agriculture of the Union of South Africa that meetings of agricultural chemists of the Empire should therefore be arranged at intervals to discuss methods, consider their application and debate results. Personal consultations and discussions in which points left obscure in correspondence can be fully elucidated are more likely to be pregnant of results than arguments conveyed solely by paper, for personal contact with fellow workers is a potent force in removing reticence and undoubtedly provides a stimulus for progressive and concerted effort.

3. COLONIAL OFFICE CONFERENCE, 1927.

(a) *The Control of Animal Diseases in the Empire.* (Memorandum by Sir Arnold Theiler.)

(Extract).

Suggestions.

A. Co-ordination.

* * * *

2. The holding of congresses at reasonably short intervals—say 3-5 years.

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(b) *Memorandum by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

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Next in importance to the adequate production and interchange of published information is the periodical opportunity given by Colonial Governments to officers in their Agricultural Departments to visit other territories. This can be effected in two ways. First by the holding of periodical conferences in groups of Colonies. These are of exceptional value not only in themselves, but also by reason of the facilities they provide for workers in similar fields to meet and discuss common problems informally, and to see how those problems are being tackled under varying conditions. Such conferences have already taken place in the West Indies; there was also a South and East Africa cotton conference at Nairobi last year; and a West African agricultural conference at Ibadan in Nigeria in the spring of this year.

4. GOLD COAST : MEMORANDUM. Necessity for Organising Regular Regional Agricultural Conferences.

A cycle of Agricultural Conferences has been established by the British Colonies in West Africa, the first four recurrences of which are as follows :—

1927 Nigeria
1929 Gold Coast
1931 Sierra Leone
1933 Gambia.

The first was held in March of this year, and has been found of great value. Officers learnt to know each other and each other's work, this exchange of knowledge alone being of enough value to warrant a regular recurrence of similar meetings in the future. In addition, questions of policy concerning agricultural development were referred by the Governments to the conference for discussion and advice.

The need for agricultural conferences is greater in tropical than in temperate countries. There is a lack of exact knowledge concerning tropical crops and methods, and for many years to come no contributions to knowledge can be expected from native farmers. Each detail has to be worked out by the European Agricultural Officers, and the results applied to local peasant holdings. Instructional work has to be carried out on such a scale that very little time or staff is available for sound experimentation and trial. Under these circumstances it is necessary that officers from different tropical countries should meet regularly in order to pool all available knowledge and to compare and discuss methods.

A Government policy aimed at agricultural development is necessary in each country. It must be based on accurate technical knowledge and on thorough familiarity with local conditions. In primitive tropical countries, furthermore, every step in such a policy has to be explained to the farmer, and every means short of actual compulsion used to induce him to adopt suggestions for improvement. It follows that Government is reluctant to rely on the opinion of one officer or one Department in a matter of such complexity as the formulation and execution of an agricultural policy. There is no alternative to the device of referring important questions to a conference of experienced technical officers drawn from several countries.

It is clearly impossible to hold frequent conferences at which officers from all parts of the tropics can be present. Some method of grouping has to be devised. The groups that suggest themselves are as follows :—

1. West Africa (Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia).
2. East Africa (Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Nyasaland).
3. West Indies.
4. Indian Ocean (Ceylon, Malaya, Mauritius, Seychelles).
5. Pacific (Queensland, Fiji).

Of these, the West African group has adopted a system of regular conferences; the West Indies have in the past held recurrent conferences. A Pan-Pacific group has been formed on the initiative of the United States, in which Hawaii, Malaya, Australia, Japan and the Netherlands East Indies have taken part.

The problem of bringing the tropics up to a state of efficiency somewhat comparable with that existing in temperate climates is not peculiar to British Colonies. It is a world-problem and there is everything to be gained by enlisting the co-operation of other countries. In the case of the West African Conferences the French Colonies should certainly be asked to take part, and the Belgian and Portuguese Colonies have similar crops and similar problems to the British and French countries.

Free interchange of opinions, discussions and decisions is necessary between the various groups. For this, each group must be in

possession of schedules of fixtures of other groups, and reports of proceedings must be exchanged. In addition, it would appear feasible for one group conference to refer its major problems to others for consideration and advice. With schedules fixed in advance, it would be comparatively easy to arrange for a representative of one group to attend conferences of a neighbouring group. In the case of British Colonies, co-ordination of this kind could be arranged through the proposed Imperial Bureau of Agriculture.

5. KENYA : MEMORANDUM. Organisation of Agricultural Conferences.

The East African Agricultural Conference of 1926 was called to enable an interchange of views to take place between Agricultural Officers of the various dependencies and so forth.

The organisation and preparation for a conference is laborious and consists—

- (i) in the issue of invitations by the "host" country to other countries ;
- (ii) the appointment of delegates, who present,
- (iii) the memoranda submitted by their own Departments on,
- (iv) the special subjects which fall to be treated at the meetings with a view to,
- (v) eliciting information and advice, to express their opinions and disseminate information, on the matters, so that
- (vi) concerted and parallel action may be determined to deal with similar problems in different countries.

At these conferences surveys of progress made and of investigations in hand should be presented which will give the group of countries a more particular idea of the work which is being done and the trend of events.

Conferences are held by groups of Colonies elsewhere.

It is therefore thought that a definite method of organising conferences of this nature be laid down, and that shortly after the conclusion of one conference advance arrangements should be made to hold the next one at a 3 or 5 years' interval.

It is suggested that at its inception the Director of Agriculture of the proposed "host" country should appoint a Secretary to keep in touch with other countries, and to keep the prospect of a conference in view.

As to the organisation of the conference session itself that presents but little difficulty, each conference being an improvement on the model already applied.

Delegates may have suggestions as to the organisation, scope and extent of conferences, may suggest the attendance of Imperial

Officers interested in the different subjects, and the attendance of farmers and private people who have special knowledge of some aspects of the work.

6. NIGERIA : MEMORANDUM. Veterinary Conferences.

For many years International Veterinary Congresses have been held in Europe; Veterinary Congresses at which representatives of the Union of South Africa, Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Rhodesia, Belgian Congo and Madagascar, are present are occasionally held. The proceedings of these congresses and conferences are published in full detail.

